

**Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Health Sub-Committee
Tuesday, February 28th**

**Written Testimony In Support of H.B. No. 6659: An Act Concerning the State Budget for
The Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations Therefore**

**By Matthew Morgan
Executive Director, Journey Home**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Vice Chairs Hartley, Exum, and Paris, and Ranking Members Berthel and Nuccio, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am a resident of West Hartford and I have worked in the nonprofit sector for almost 20 years and have served as Journey Home's Executive Director for the past twelve years, and I write today on behalf of the thousands of people who experience homelessness in the Capital Region every year, as well as the thousands of people who are unstably housed and who are at risk of homelessness. Journey Home coordinates the homeless response system in the Capitol Region and serves as the backbone support agency for the Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network (CAN) and the Central CT CAN. We work every day with the warming centers and emergency shelters and street outreach programs, and rental assistance programs. We work with more than 100 programs to prevent as many people from becoming homeless as possible, and to house as many people as we can as quickly as possible. We also provide donated furniture and household goods to people moving from homelessness to housing.

The impact on housing of this pandemic has been massive. The increased housing prices, interest rates, high costs of other basic necessities like food, and the end of pandemic relief programs means more people will be facing homelessness than ever before.

Our collective impact efforts are more important now than ever. The CAN structures have helped us move to a shared community responsibility for the well-being of people experiencing homelessness. CAN backbone support agencies provide facilitation and accountability to make sure people don't fall between the cracks and to solve complex cases. We use data to make more informed decisions, and to identify gaps. CANs use collective brain-power to support people to overcome barriers to move into housing. CANs have made amazing progress on reducing homelessness among special populations like chronic homelessness, family homelessness, youth/young adult homelessness, homeless veterans, and people living with HIV/AIDS. We need to expand that progress to everyone experiencing homelessness. Every person at risk of homelessness has a situation that is unique, and sometimes it is impossible to predict the challenges they face. In a highly competitive rental market, the clients we serve often can't compete with people who have fewer barriers, and landlords do not want to wait for inspections and other regulatory hurdles, because they lose money for every day that their apartments are not rented. We need flexible funds to pay for holding fees, landlord incentives, rental application fees, pet fees, vital document fees, landlord risk mitigation funds, moving expenses, transportation for prospective tenants to view apartments, security deposit assistance (when not eligible for other programs), utility arrears, and other barriers to housing that we can't predict ahead of time.

Turnover in staff means clogs in our system. People experiencing homelessness desperately need services. When housing or shelter Case managers leave, it causes delays in getting people housed during the time we have to recruit and onboard new staff. Our system needs to flow to be effective. The longer people stay in shelter, the less capacity we have to accommodate others who are having a crisis. Turnover in shelter diversion staff can mean longer waits to get a CAN appointment through 211. Turnover in rapid rehousing means there are less staff to help locate apartments and help clients through the leasing process.

Housing is a human right and homelessness is a prime example of the failure of our society to take care of its citizens. The traumatic experience of homelessness often negatively impacts people for years even after they are housed. We need to rescue the homelessness response system and change this trajectory of this vulnerable population in our state.

We need this Committee's help to Rescue the Homeless Response System. Of the total \$50,000,000 to Rescue the Homeless Response System, we are asking this committee to commit to a **\$7,713,799 one-time increase in DMHAS Housing/Supports Services line** to address chronic underfunding of homeless response nonprofits and to ensure adequate wages for front-line homeless response workers.

There remains no dedicated annual funding for the parts of our system that our communities rely on year after year. Therefore, we also request your support for the following annual amounts:

- **\$5.95 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for Coordinated Access Network infrastructure, to ensure that the indispensable emergency services we provide are available to all.
- **\$5 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for the annual Cold Weather Emergency Response Program.
- **\$2 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for a Flexible Funding Subsidy Pool to subsidize housing and provide flexible assistance, which have been shown to lower costs to the health care system and lead to improved individual health outcomes.

Thank you to the committee for this opportunity to testify. It is with your support that we can rescue the homeless response system and help make sure Connecticut's residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,



Matthew Morgan
Executive Director
Journey Home